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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

8 April 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT: Post Mortem on SNIE 14.3-64: THE OUTLOOK FOR NORTH VIETNAM

1. The attached post-mortem has been approved by the Board of National Estimates pursuant to a consideration of it by the USIB representatives.
2. You will note that this is the revision of the Post Mortem which USIB directed be prepared. (See USIB-M-315, 4 March 1964)
3. This item has been placed on the agenda of the USIB meeting scheduled for 1030, Wednesday, 15 April.



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Executive Officer
National Estimates

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

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1. North Vietnam is one of the areas of the Communist world about which we know the least. The North Vietnamese press and radio are the major -- and often the only -- sources of political and economic intelligence about North Vietnam.

2. Our information is probably best, relatively speaking, concerning economic affairs. Even here we depend largely on information and statistics published by North Vietnam, although trade statistics can be compiled largely from figures released by other countries. We have very much less opportunity for cross-checking economic data, however, than we do in the case of Soviet Bloc countries.

3. In the political field, our main source, as in other Communist countries, is overt material, but our scanty background information makes it difficult to use overt material effectively. It is supplemented to a limited extent by the information reports

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[redacted] and the open stories of the few Western journalists

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permitted to visit North Vietnam. All of these reflect severe limitations on travel and access to various classes of people, and in many cases rely on DRV information handouts. The result is a severe deficiency in our knowledge of political developments and prospects and of the dynamics which govern them.

4. On military matters, where North Vietnamese security is most stringent, our intelligence is especially weak, particularly with respect to the size, organization, and capabilities of the military establishment.

5. We believe that the Army has 11 major infantry units but cannot determine how many of these units are divisions and how many are brigades. (The consensus is that five probably are divisions, five probably are brigades, and one could be either.) We have been aware of North Vietnamese efforts to reorganize the ground forces but remain largely ignorant of details. As a result of significant gaps in our information, our estimate of the personnel strength of the Army -- between 200-250,000 men -- could be off by as much as 100,000. We know little about the commanders of the infantry divisions and brigades or of command structure, organization,

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types and conditions of equipment, individual and unit training, troop morale, and personnel and combat service support procedures. Similar gaps exist in our intelligence on artillery, armor, and air defense. Little is known of the command and staff relationships among the PAVN, the regional commands and the militia. Information is lacking on the country's military mobilization potential. In the field of military logistics we have been unable to determine the status of North Vietnam's war reserves or the extent of foreign military assistance.

6. For the Navy, estimates of personnel strength vary from 2,500 to 5,000. Detailed information on naval organization, equipment, and training is scarce. Our effort to develop a more comprehensive determination of naval capabilities has been hindered by lack of knowledge concerning operational and materiel readiness, logistics, doctrine, and expansion plans.

7. Regarding the Air Force, there is a critical need for information on the extent of combat pilot training in North Vietnam and abroad, organization and strength, logistics, air-defense capability, aircraft inventory, and plans for expansion.

8. The organization and strength of North Vietnam's militia and internal security components are unknown, and as a result

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estimates on the size of the militia have varied from one hundred thousand to two million. The figure most generally used (500,000) is derived from a demographic calculation weighing such uncertain factors as the proportion of physically fit and politically reliable men in the population. Our estimate that the strength of the Armed Peoples' Security Forces (APSF) is around 15,000 is based on the belief that since the Army's security battalions are organized on a provincial basis, the APSF probably is similarly organized. It is therefore estimated that one APSF battalion of 500 men probably exists for each of the approximately 30 provinces. There are no firm details to support these estimates.

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